DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 883 RC 019 686

AUTHOR DeYoung, Alan J.; And Others
TITLE The Cultural Contradictions of Middle Schooling for Rural Community Survival.
PUB DATE Jul 94
NOTE 39p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Early Adolescents; *Educational Change; Educational Philosophy; *Instructional Program Divisions; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; *Rural Schools; School Closing; *School Community Relationship; *School Organization
IDENTIFIERS *Community Viability

ABSTRACT

During 1968-91, middle schools were the only school type to grow in number, increasing by over 400 percent. Middle school advocates focus on early adolescents' need for developmentally appropriate institutions, but show only a weak historical understanding of the emergence and status of middle schools. Critical factors in early support for the middle school movement included urban interests in countering de facto school segregation without use of busing, urban overcrowding of elementary and high schools, and a "bandwagon effect"--the desire to appear modern and reform oriented. The emergence of rural middle schools under the cloak of psychological progress can be destructive to both the declining sense of community in America, and to the actual persistence of many rural communities still organized around K-8 or K-6 public elementary schools. Examination of the National Center for Education Statistics's Common Core of Data indicates that the construction of rural middle schools has led to the closing and consolidation of rural elementary schools. During the school years 1987/88-1991/92 the proportion of schools that were middle schools increased 20 percent in rural areas, was unchanged in suburban areas, and decreased 6 percent in urban areas. At the same time, the proportion of rural schools that were K-8 declined precipitously. Emerging school reform agendas that provide alternatives to the "inevitability" of consolidation include efforts to restructure schools as caring communities (requiring active parent and community participation), and the development of rural schools as centers for integrated social services. Contains 52 references. (SV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 372 883

The Cultural Contradictions of Middle Schooling for Rural Community Survival

Alan J. DeYoung
University of Kentucky

Craig Howley
Appalachia Educational Laboratory

Paul Theobald
South Dakota State University

July 1994

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Craig B. Howley
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

RC 019686

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Cultural Contradictions of Middle Schooling for Rural Community Survival

Alan J. DeYoung
University of Kentucky

Craig Howley
Appalachia Educational Laboratory

Paul Theobald
South Dakota State University

> Today, it is clear that the middle school has moved into the organizational mainstream and is likely to continue to dominate intermediate education as educators prepare for the twenty-first century. As of the early 1990s, a body of literature, associations, conferences, and legislation all are emerging to promote the middle school concept and philosophy (Wiles and Bondi, 1993; vii).

Many educators welcome the announcement that middle grade schooling has once again moved from being "subject-centered" to "learner-centered." Available data on contemporary school organization in the U.S. also supports the notion that middle schools are popular organizational forms. Between 1968 and 1991, middle schools were the only school type to grow in number. In point of fact, the number of identified middle schools increased by over 400 percent during this era (from 2,080 to 8,545) according to the U.S. Department of Education. Meanwhile, the total number of U.S. schools dropped from 94,197 to 81,746 during this period, and the number of elementary and junior high schools--from which the middle school grades were usually gathered--dropped from 67,186 to 59,015 and from 7,437 to 4,561 respectively (NCES, 1992). Clearly, in terms of numbers, the

"middle school phenomenon" is no illusion.

Those who assert the benefits of middle schooling claim that irrefutable evidence proves that early adolescents "need" developmentally appropriate institutions:

> This time [preadolescence] is of immense importance in the development of the young person. Biologically, young adolescents experience puberty, a period of growth and development more rapid than in any other phase of life except infancy. Over four or five years, dramatic changes occur in height, weight, and body composition, and young people acquire the capacity to reproduce. Youth enter puberty at a significantly younger age today than in previous generations. (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, p. 21)

Lack of an institution designed to take specific account of such characteristics, the middle school advocates argue, seriously handicaps preadolescents' learning endeavors. For example:

> Preadolescence is a restless age for girls and boys. The torture of trying to sit still in school is obvious, and some pupils learn to perform remarkable feats of contortion without falling out of their chairs. Therefore, a school atmosphere in which physical movement is integral to the educative process is of high priority for the preadolescent. Activity-related learning (for example drawing, designing, constructing, and making displays), as well as moving from classroom to library or from classroom to play center, is vital to the preadolescent. In other words, a steady grind at the school desk is undesirable at this restless age (Wiles and Bondi, p. 35).

Of course, though such attributions pertain to many preadolescents, they also pertain to most children; and it is equally true most adults tire of a "steady grind" at a desk, regardless of age. The behaviors so commonly attributed to

preadolescents may well result more from societal norms of childrearing than from inherent developmental transformations. These norms, in fact, shape how Americans organize instruction--including the forms actually assumed and the functions actually undertaken in middle schools.

Misunderstanding the Organization of Instruction

The middle school movement is clearly a strong and vital feature of school reform in the late twentieth century, although its future is less secure than advocates may wish (Cuban, 1993). And, those of us who work in rural places may choose rather to work for its demise than for its expansion.

Middle school champions show only a weak historical understanding of the emergence and status of this organizational form. They may be least well-placed to predict the future. Middle school advocates are typically developmentalists who believe that schools are or ought to be dedicated to instructional objectives posed by the nature and interests of the learners themselves (Kliebard, 1986). They believe that school reform is (and ought to be) driven by advances in scientific understanding of the nature of childhood (or preadolescence, in this case).

The historical institution of mass schooling, however, both in America and world-wide, has not been implemented to nurture the personal fulfillment and satisfaction of young people. Rather, cognitive and behavioral sciences are usually used to

advise and improve institutional means, not for the consideration of desirable ends or goals. The aims of mass schooling--arguably pioneered in the U.S.--concern the development of narrowly defined behaviors and technical capacities congruent with interpretations of the national interest (Meyer, Benavot, Cha, Kamens, & Wong, 1992). One of us shows in a forthcoming work how such aims, even when couched in the language of "academic rigor," implement schooling as an anti-intellectual regimen (Howley, Howley, & Pendarvis, in press).

Middle school advocates seem to overlook such issues, for they fail to comprehend the social context of their of their work. Wiles and Bondi, for example, suggest the myopia frequently adhered to by devout developmentalists when they claim "a successful middle school depends more on faculties than on facilities, more on people than on the purse (p.1)." In pages ahead, we will suggest that exactly the reverse is true with respect to the status of rural American communities. In these places, facilities and purses attendant to the construction of middle schools often have devastating effects.

Capturing a Historical Dimension

The general problem of untangling (or at least investigating) purpose and direction of school reform in the U.S., we believe, is well considered by the recent work of Herbert Kliebard (1986). Kliebard describes American school reform efforts over much of the last century as a series of

contests between four contending world views over the means and ends of schooling. The four contending camps, he claims, are those of humanists, developmentalists, social efficiency advocates, and social meliorists. Although Kliebard's analysis centered upon competing curricular perspectives between 1896 and 1953, similar forces compel the battles within school reform movements today (Howley et al., in press).

In the age (largely in the 18th century and earlier) when formal education beyond the rudiments represented the aspirations of the landed gentry, an appreciation of the liberal arts and humanities were synonymous with schooling. Later advocates for school reform who held such commitments were Humanists, according to Kliebard. Their influence began to wane early in the century, under the assault of more practical or more pressing concerns--scientific, economic, and social. Among those who claim allegiance (a quite dubious allegiance according to Moretti, 1993) are conservative critics of schooling like Ed Hirsch and former Secretary of Education William Bennett (1989).

Late nineteenth century humanists were attacked as outmoded by both the developmentalists and those who saw the role of school as critical to developing students as resources for economic and institutional progress of the culture. Today's middle school advocates make the same sorts of Developmentalist arguments for restructuring adolescent learning environments as their early twentieth century ancestors did for establishing graded elementary schools and junior high schools in the era of

the First World War. While internal disputes among Developmentalists were important, in essence they all agreed that whatever passed for education had to have its origin within the mind and experience of the child. Education could not and should not be imposed from without, for all children go through stages of mental, physiological and psychological development which determines what and when they can learn. Like today's middle school spokespersons, they presented evidence for such views based on advances in the scientific study of children and their "needs."

On the other hand, social efficiency advocates, in Kliebard's account, claimed to be more pragmatic in their educational concerns, and insisted that schools ought not be created for the good of the child, but for the good of a changing and economically diversifying economic and social structure. Investments in public schooling needed to have an eye to the payoff for society for such investments, and whatever got taught in the public school, they reasoned, demanded real-world vocational and social utility. And, they insisted, whatever was taught must be taught efficiently and effectively. Outcomes-based education in the school reform rhetoric of today well illustrates the concerns of this increasingly powerful perspective.

Kliebard labels his final category of historical school reformers as social meliorists. These folk believed that improving the social condition of children born to poverty and

neglect ought to be the primary focus of public schools. And they believed that public schools could and should be the agency which investigated and helped to solve the social problems of the day. Social meliorists argued that the humanists were to tied to the past; that the social efficiency folks would primarily enhance the mindless economic development trajectories of a culture losing touch with human and community needs; and that developmentalism might elucidate some educational means, but had nothing to say about desirable social aims of schooling.

Schools for Preadolescents in the Twentieth Century

Kliebard's analysis of school reform to mid-twentieth century tells us little about the middle school per se. His work focuses primarily on the secondary school, and he ends his historical account before middle schools (by that name) emerged. His key point, however, is central: understanding the nature and dynamics of school reform is a complex task. In particular, such understanding is impossible without a keen appreciation of the contradictory ideological commitments that shape reformism. Initiatives launched under the officially sanctioned banners of school improvement (e.g., "systemic reform" in our own day) carry ideological commitments often in opposition to the school improvement proposals and hopes of other groups, both formal and informal. We only get significant educational reform, Kliebard argues, when contending parties find some common ground or larger cultural issue that demands an institutional response in which

contending educational camps can simultaneously find sufficient room for parts of their agendas. And, since school reform for the sake of school reform has become a cultural obsession, an institution in itself, since the 1960s, it is quite likely that the public has come to expect that educational "innovation" is the norm for practice in schooling.

For those of us who deal with rural schools and rural education, however, the continuing infatuation with school "improvement" and school reform presents, at best, ambiguous opportunities and, at worst, an outright threat to the public good. We are often witness to officially instigated school improvement efforts, by both state and federal governments, that transform the very meaning of schooling in the eyes of the communities we are familiar with. Sometimes this transformation is little understood and little welcomed--school consolidation being an excellent example (DeYoung, 1994; Smith and DeYoung, 1988).

Before turning to the cultural contradictions of middle schooling for our many remaining but struggling rural communities, we want to first review serious weaknesses in the logic and rhetoric of middle schooling and its "philosophy."

Junior High Schools: Precursors of the Middle School

The fact that there are and always have been competing perspectives for the ends of schooling (e.g., as with Kliebard's four-part scheme) belies all claims that the dominion of middle

schools is in any way inevitable. We should also note that the "torture" of having to sit through instructional periods dominated by teachers is reported by not only preadolescents, but also by younger and older children and by graduate students of our acquaintance. Formal schooling has never been designed by adults primarily for the benefit of children as the children themselves would define it. John Dewey early on recognized that this misconstruction of his supporters (i.e., irresponsibly putting children in charge of the curriculum) was a dangerous one (Cremin, 1961); and given the choice, few if any children would come to any institution that adults called "school." And this observation is as true now as it has always been.

This much aside, advocates for a distinct formal level between the elementary and high school are not new, and in fact have been around since the early 1900s. However, both the ideological underpinnings and formal control of such institutions has changed throughout this century. Larry Cuban argues that concerns about the academic and college-prep orientation of high schools (inheritors of the purposes of the private academies that had appeared nearly everywhere in the early 1800s) shortly after the turn of the 20th century precipitate the junior high movement.

Advocates of the junior high school believed that social adjustment and rudimentary training in occupational skills were key pedagogical purposes lacking in high schools, for high schools during this period were increasingly attempting to

position themselves as preparatory to higher education (Cuban, 1993). These dynamics all occurred in an age, of course, when high school completion was still the exception and not the rule--during the 20th century, proportional growth in enrollments was almost entirely due to the increased numbers of 14-18 year olds attending the newly constructed public high schools. The 19th century had, in fact, provided a successful basic education to most of the population outside the South and Southwest (where African Americans and Mexican Americans were excluded).

The junior high movement was thus a distinctly urban effort to create intermediary institutions designed to feed a few students into college-bound tracks and enabling many others to acquire social and occupational "skills" deemed needful for a functional urban social life. Thus, the junior high school was an urban institutional response to the hypothetical needs of atomized children in our central cities. Because rural places were losing population rather than gaining, and because the linkage between junior high and local occupations was less clear, separate junior highs in rural places were less likely to emerge, and when they did, they were often housed in the same building as town high schools. Departmentalized junior highs were comparatively rare in rural America until the 1950s when school consolidation began to make them economically feasible in some areas.

By the 1930s and 1940s, junior high schools and senior high schools had increasingly become terminal institutions: Entry

into the workforce often involved formal public instruction at the secondary level. In Kliebard's view, industrial and vocational agriculture programs were as often as not the reason students attended secondary schools, but often they left secondary schools (i.e., "dropped out") when favorable employment was secured. By the late 1950s, however, secondary schools were increasingly successful in preparing high-school students for college entry (Trow, 1959); at least, greater numbers of citizens were taking part in postsecondary schooling, just as, previously, greater numbers had begun to take part in secondary schooling.

Part of this "success" might be due to the control of junior high schools by senior high administrators. Faced with mounting pressure to successfully graduate their students, senior high principals and superintendents had transformed the junior high curriculum between the 1920s and 1960s into academic courses preparatory to high school entrance and completion, thus undermining their initial pedagogical aims (Cuban, 1993).

Developmentalism and the Middle School?

The 1960s saw a reawakening of interest in the developmental needs of middle adolescence (Beane, 1990; Alexander, 1968). Invariably, advocates for middle schooling explain its importance in developmental terms, arguing that the special circumstances and needs of young adolescence require more opportunity for maturation and growth than is available in elementary school, but less rigor and competition than is available in the high school.

As suggested earlier, such claims are typically defended with reference to advances in psychological research, research which advocates use to underscore their interests in a new organizational form:

> Finally, in the early 1960s the forces of human development research were pushing American education closer to a reformation of both the purpose and structure of schooling. Of particular influence were the translations of Jean Piaget's work, a major study of human development from ten to fourteen by the University of California at Berkeley, and the first efforts to integrate this nation's schools.
>
> By 1965, the United States was "primed" for the invention of a number of new educational programs including early childhood education, middle school education, gifted education, and special education. All of these new programs shared the common denominator of being focused on human growth and development, and collectively they ushered in a new era of American education (1993; 4).

While romantic and progressive notions of middle school formation can clearly be seen in these passages, in fact it was the economic and social concerns of America's cities that were primarily responsible for today's middle school movement. Even supporters of middle schools agree that various urban economic and social concerns were critical in early support for the movement. These included: (1) interests in creating a new organizational form to counter the effects of de-facto segregation in our cities without increased use of busing; (2) efforts at creating new organizational structures to deal with urban overcrowding of high and elementary schools; and (3) a "bandwagon effect" where the middle school concept appearing in

one city led to demand in other places to be likewise reform oriented (Wiles and Bondi, 1993). In a culture where all school systems are attempting to appear modern, "going to the middle school concept" has now become de rigueur.

Critiquing the Middle School Movement

The rhetoric of middle schoolers continues to involve the social adjustment of youngsters. While this concern may be admirable, supporters of middle schools delude themselves on this basis. America has never constructed social institutions solely for the psychological needs of children. Formal institutions like schools emerge only when social change undermines, engulfs, or sweeps away previously serviceable institutional patterns. We remain convinced that desegregation concerns, school enrollment pressures, and the "bandwagon effect" better explain the emergence of middle schools as institutions than does concern for preadolescent development. We admit, however, that the developmental rhetoric helps smooth the way.

In addition, the "softening" of schools for preadolescents--that is, reorienting the middle-level schooling to development and allegations of individual psychological appropriateness--has not been a trend reserved for former junior high students. It also occurred in secondary schools during the past three decades (Cusick, 1983). From the mid 1960s and up until quite recently, for instance, high schools often responded to demands to educate all students by diversifying their curriculum and lowering

academic standards for students while explaining such institutional changes as functions of student development and interest (Sizer, 1984). Although many students continued in college preparatory programs, students not considered capable of college entry were given elective programs where alternate career paths could be considered and where student "psychological needs" were frequently the focus of school improvement efforts (e.g., Cusick, 1983; Jackson, 1992).

The language of school improvement for "at-risk" populations in our comprehensive high schools today, for instance, often approximates the language of middle school advocates, and it sounds this way not because of psychological breakthroughs, but arguably because of the special problems most public schools face when charged to educate all local students, not just those intending college enrollment.

Consequences of Middle Schooling for Rural Community Survival

Critiquing the need for middle schools as presented by their defenders is relatively easy. But more is at stake in rural America than an intellectual argument over the aims of middle schooling. Rather, on two accounts, the emergence of middle schools under the cloak of psychological progress can be destructive to both the declining sense of community in America, and to the actual persistence of many rural communities still organized around K-8 or K-6 public schools.

Incredibly, Wiles and Bondi (1993, p. 6) suggest such

organizational forms were eliminated in America decades ago. Nonetheless, K-8 and K-6 schools are still common, if threatened, throughout rural America today. And many rural communities in the U.S. cling stubbornly to their remaining schools as social centers; but talk of "improving" school systems by "moving to a middle school concept" can directly threaten rural elementary schools and by default those communities which lie around them.

Implications of Middle Schooling for Small Communities

Based upon fieldwork in numerous school districts, particularly southern county school districts, the promise (or threat) of building middle schools is often problematic (DeYoung, 1991a; DeYoung, 1994). On one hand, rural school districts--typically at the behest of state education departments--often participate in nationally inspired school reform efforts. And, having a middle school often symbolizes an educationally progressive posture. On the other hand, school districts with small or declining student enrollments frequently have numerous small elementary schools that were formed themselves in decades past by consolidating even smaller two- and three-room schools. Often, the remaining small elementary schools have only one or two classes per grade level, and such schools commonly comprise either K-6 or K-8 grade configurations. State and local education agencies are likely to target just such schools for consolidation (combination and closure) as student enrollments drop.

Teachers and school superintendents often maintain that larger schools are typically better schools, or at least they are more cost-effective to operate (Monk, 1991). In many county districts (counties are the norm for school districts in the Southeast), curricular breadth and efficiency arguments continue to serve as acceptable warrants for consolidation efforts, yielding typically several elementary schools spanning seven or nine school years and a single county high school (DeYoung, 1991a; DeYoung, 1994). As dropout rates decrease, more and more students continue persist in high schools that previously had allowed seventeen and eighteen year olds to leave. Overcrowding in many such places, coupled with growing national calls for going to "the middle school concept" lead many districts to construct district middle schools. This is typically done by taking one or two grade levels from both the high school and district elementary schools. Continuing the domino effect, this then leads to consolidating elementary schools due to even smaller elementary school enrollments, as removal of an entire grade level (or two) makes former elementary schools too small to receive state school building subsidies.

The Common Core of Data covering the school years 1987/88 through 1991/92 clearly suggests the power of "the middle school concept" to "solve" low enrollment problems in a nation uncommitted to shoring-up small communities via public education. This dataset, developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (1993), contains directory-style information on every

public school in the nation. It is particularly useful to us because among its variables are ones that specify each school's low and high grades, enrollment, and for the past five years, each school's "type of locale," which is a geographic location variable.

Insert Figure P about here

We first asked the National Data Resource Center (NDRC) to provide us with a rough nationwide indication of the absolute and proportional changes in the number of middle-level schools during the applicable period (1987/88-1991-92) by type of locale. We defined middle-level schools as those with low grades greater than 4 and high grades less than 10. On this basis a variety of configurations count as middle schools.

Crosstabulations provided by NDRC indicated that in rural areas (as defined by the appropriate NCES type of locale code), middle-level schools (as we defined them) increased nationwide as a proportion of all schools over this five year period. Table N1 presents the relevant data.

Insert Table N1 about here

Two observations seem most important with respect to the data in Table N1. First, in rural areas nationwide, the percentage increase in the proportion of schools that are middle-

level schools is 19.7 percent (based on the increase from 10.09 to 12.08 percent). This contrasts to the national trend where there was virtually no increase in the percentage of middle schools, and to the trend in urban areas, where the proportion of all schools that were middle-level schools actually declined by 5.9 percent (based on the decrease from 13.95 to 13.12 percent). It is important to recall that the CCD represents the actual universe of all schools and is not a sample.

We next performed two further analyses to provide greater detail. First, we repeated the national analysis for the four-state region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia) served by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL). Appalachian states--together with states like Vermont and New Hampshire--are among the most rurally populated areas of the nation. That is, while population density is low in comparison to urban locations, population dispersion is more uniform than is the case elsewhere (e.g. in western states like Colorado and Arizona). In short, ruralness does not mean vast spaces empty of population in states like West Virginia and Vermont.

The results of this analysis (see Table N2) accord well with the apparent national trends. Here again, there are notable increases in the numbers and proportions of middle-level schools in rural areas, with decreases evident elsewhere.

Insert table N2 about here

In a subsidiary analysis, we examined the effect of the creation of specialized middle-level schools on the existence of schools with other types of grade level configurations. Two likely possible effects of creating more middle level schools are (1) the concomitant decline of traditional K-8 elementary schools and (2) the contingent creation of more K-6 "residual" elementary schools.

To assess this possible effect, we created a more complex typology of eight school configurations including three types of focal interest: full elementary; primary or K-6 elementary; and a revised middle-level configuration (high grades 7 to 9 and low grade 4 or higher). We crosstabulated the numbers and proportions (of all schools) for each of these configurations in rural areas for the years 1987/88 versus 1991/92. We also assessed the enrollments for each type during these years. Table N3 presents the results.

Insert table N3 about here

The data in Table N3 tend to support the conventional wisdom, but also reveal another interesting trend. First, we observe that, as predicted, the number and proportion of full-elementary configuration types declined in rural areas of the AEL region, whereas both the number and proportion of K-6 residual elementary configuration schools increased in tandem with an increased number and proportion of the middle school

configuration type. Second, we note that the average enrollment in all three configuration types increased over the five year period.

Specifically, in the rural areas of the AEL region, the proportion of all schools in the full-elementary configuration type declined precipitously, both in absolute numbers and in proportion to all schools: a 27 percent decline in absolute numbers and a 24 percent decline on the basis of proportion in just five years. At the same time, however, the proportion of schools of the residual elementary type and the middle-level type increased by 12.6 and 11.3 percent, respectively. Average enrollments in the three configuration types (full elementary, residual elementary, and middle-level) increased by 3.8, 3.8, and 10 percent, respectively. From 1987 to 1991 student enrollment in rural areas of this four-state region declined 1.8 percent (from 750,799 to 737,133); the rural type of locale was the only locale to exhibit a decrease in this time-span.

These data document what is happening, and what our experiences in rural schools suggest: The creation of middle schools provides an opportunity for more widespread consolidation. New middle schools gather students in larger units, but their construction also provides the opportunity to close other schools--most likely the smaller K-8 types that will not be considered viable once their upper-grade students have departed. These residual schools produce residual students to be merged with students at more viable residual elementary schools.

The empirical data clearly suggests that promoting the "middle school philosophy" is consistent with, and that it facilitates, continued attempts to consolidate rural schooling, at least in the five-year period for which national and regional data are available. What we observe in rural areas may be the final step in constructing a "modernist" system that sorts children into larger units of increasingly narrow age groupings in the name of efficiency. Interestingly, even in the mid-size cities of the AEL region, both the number and proportion of middle-level schools declined from 1987/88 to 1991/92 (by 7.8 and 5.4 percent, respectively).

What's Really at Issue?

Professional arguments in favor of moving to middle schools in rural places--because this was the trend in metropolitan areas--is misguided. The urban problems of system-wide overcrowding and desegregation dynamics, which are admittedly behind the national movement, do not characterize rural America's social or economic realities very well. Here, the transportation, economic, and demographic forces of the national culture have for decades been eroding and eliminating rural towns, villages, and farms. Geographic and social communities disappear in rural America. Urban and suburban places confront challenges that differ from those that confront rural places, and they embody different commitments (Stern, 1994). Certainly the very existence of geographic entities is not at stake in the same

way in urban and suburban areas (CDF, 1992; Hobbs, 1992).

Many professional educators also fail to recognize that schools have social functions in addition to instructional ones. Particularly in rural places, these other functions often assume greater importance with school participants (particularly students and parents) than the instructional ones (Waller, 1932; Coleman, 1961). Teachers and school administrators, imbued by their training with an understanding of young people from developmental perspectives, typically believe (for instance) that high school sports are merely a physical release for students. Students, parents and alumni themselves, however, often believe such activities are a primary source of community identity and commitment. David Tyack traces the evolution of such sentiments in rural places well:

> During the nineteenth century the country school belonged to the community in more than a legal sense: it was frequently the focus for people's lives outside the home....In one-room schools all over the nation ministers met their flocks, politicians caucused with the faithful, families gathered for Christmas parties and hoe-downs, the Grange held its baked-bean suppers, Lyceum lecturers spoke, itinerants introduced the wonders of the lantern-slide and the crank-up phonograph, and neighbors gathered to hear spelling bees and declamations....As one of the few social institutions which rural people encountered daily, the common school both reflected and shaped a sense of community.
>
> (1974, pp. 15-17)

In urban places, of course, public schools rarely enjoyed such popularity because they were among <u>many</u> social institutions

developing simultaneously. There, community social life occurred in a myriad of non-school settings from the playhouse to the movie theater to the roller rink and to the YMCA. Schools there were likely viewed as less socially multidimensional, while rural schools were the main venue for all forms of social life until most recently (Peshkin, 1978, 1982). Because parents and community members consider curricular improvements (e.g., implementing the middle-school philosophy) as just one dimension of schooling, hardly its sole or even its most important objective, most consolidation efforts lead by the profession and by state and local education agencies usually gets a hostile reception from citizens.

Citizens, however, typically act under the sway of an understandable illusion. In consolidation battles, they believe that they live in a democracy and that their voices in such matters are entitled to be heard and heeded. They do not realize that both case law and legislation clearly declares school districts as entities in which citizens have few vested rights. States have the clear authority to create and abolish districts, as districts have the clear authority to create and abolish schools--with minimal input from the public (Howley, 1993). This explains why citizens often feel that local hearings on school closure are perfunctory exercises: Often, they are, because no more is required by law than to hold such a hearing. Consideration or disregard of input provided is almost always within the discretion of the relevant authority.

We submit that belief in the practical utility of middle schooling in many rural places will further erode rural communities, which continue to identify their local schools as symbolic and central to the very existence of their social life (DeYoung, 1994). To the extent which Americans in rural locales continue to value a sense of place and a sense of the particular communities in such places, they need to resist the philosophy of "the middle school concept" when professional educators begin to talk about "school improvement." Otherwise they may improve their own school right out of existence.

Educational Trends in Opposition to the Logic of Middle Schooling

The idea of the middle school is founded on the assumption that the individual is the focus of pedagogy, and that theories of personal and psychological development ought to inform and dictate institutional practice. If the psychological "needs" of the learner is the focal point, then the "needs" of communities logically come second. But educational reform attending to such psychological needs is not the only initiative that one might choose. As Kliebard would no doubt concur, each of the other three ideological views on the nature and purpose of schooling have agendas which may or may not coexist with the developmental logic of middle schooling.

One emergent school reform agenda which could undercut the "inevitability" of consolidation and segmentation of the school population by age is the concerted effort to restore or build

school communities as caring places (Brown, 1991; Noddings, 1988; Sizer, 1984). In our view, such efforts would fall within the social meliorist arena in Kliebard's scheme--but at least some of the positions in most of the ideologies of American schooling can easily accommodate features of this perspective. Mainstream researchers and theorists have already begun to approve the idea that such reconstruction stands the best chance of success in small schools (Sergiovanni, 1993).

In any event, underlying this restructuring agenda is the conviction that schools themselves should constitute communities that require active parent and community participation. But this quality of participation is extraordinarily difficult to achieve in consolidated rural schools, as children and parents must travel ever longer distances to be a part of the life of a school so far removed from their homes. Even a trip of half an hour imposes a daunting barrier: And in many places, schools are much more distant. In particular, it is claimed, low-income parents and the parents of "at-risk" children need to become part of the school-community nexus for systematic enhancement of learner success.

In light of such arguments, the value of keeping rural schools of almost any size and configuration open is substantial. The vision of schools as caring communities stands in opposition to any policy which views community (especially the external community) as secondary to instructional ends informed by alleged "advances" in understanding the developmental needs of children.

A somewhat different (and perhaps more social efficiency inspired) school reform effort is the current "one-stop" human service center concept growing in popularity in various states. In Kentucky, the recent state reform act has authorized and funded family and youth service centers currently being organized at all school sites with significant numbers of children and families living below the U.S. poverty level. Here, parents and children are encouraged to bring health, nutritional, and educational problems to the attention of service providers who are not primarily classroom educators. One criterion of success in this state will be the extent to which targeted families and children take advantage of services provided. In such an undertaking, decentralizing and dispersing the centers throughout the region--by organizing them at school sites--is hypothesized to reach more children and families than would be case if services and or service referrals were centralized. Decentralizing health and social services while simultaneously centralizing educational services in rural places would appear contradictory. We believe that it is.

Middle Schooling and the Communitarian Critique of Liberal Theory

As we have attempted to demonstrate, the policy implications for pursuing the "middle school concept" in rural America is misguided and potentially harmful, particularly for those of us who value small communities. Institutional forms borrowed from metropolitan areas can be problematic at best. And trusting

professional educators whose profession has historically been built upon individualistic sciences rather than communitarian ones probably serves interests more generic than those inherent in the diverse rural places of America.

But this essay is not really an attack on developmentalists or educators per se; all three of us are educators, and we certainly appreciate the reality of human growth. Moreover, this essay is only partly about middle schools and related debates about the nature and "needs" of preadolescence. Rather, implicit in much of what we have traced here is a small part of a greater cultural debate between traditional liberal democrats and nontraditional communitarians within Western culture.

A basic conflict within Western social theory since at least the eighteenth century has been between those who emphasize the rights of individuals and those who stress "the common good." Champions of inalienable individual rights--including the right to an education tailored to one's own individual need--remain at odds with those who argue that the general welfare of collectivities (communities, societies, nations) must take precedence over individual rights (Theobald and Newman, 1994). And we note that which collectivity one values, particularly its level of aggregation or scale, differentiates commitments among those who might all refer to themselves as upholders of the communitarian tradition (Lasch, 1991).

The recognition of this general cultural conflict is certainly well known to educators as we look outwards from the

school at national debates over who has the right to bear arms, or whether the nation ought to restrict development of wetlands or beachfront property. At this level, we all know there is a debate and there are issues. And, according to sociologists like Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985, 1991), the erosion of community under the assault of individual rights this century is having severe consequences upon how we as a people respond to collective political and cultural issues in the nation. They suggest that there may be important limits to personal autonomy and individual rights which require renewed focus if American communities (and also the individuals that constitute them) are to persist. We think that any school reform initiative that might further erode community involvement and participation in the lives of schools would be a mistake: a mistake which reformers like Goodlad (1984, 1994) and Sizer (1984, 1992) are taking pains to reverse.

Middle schools in rural places that come at the expense of closing any rural elementary (or high) school that would not be consolidated otherwise exacts an unacceptably high cost in the quality of community life, in our experience. There are <u>already far too few schools</u> in this country, assuming that we really have decided that we want the community and parents involved. We need to eschew school reform proposals in the countryside which disregard the well-being of rural communities so that the alleged rights of children to a "developmentally appropriate" education come before the common good. The critique of "middle schooling"

as a strategy for school improvement lies at the theoretical level, which we have taken some pains to document. We hope in a provocative fashion.

References

Alexander, W. et. al. The Emergent Middle School. New York: Holt Rinehart, Winston, 1968.

Beane, J. (1990). A Middle School Curriculum: From Rhetoric to Reality. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Bellah, R., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W., Swidler, A., and Tipton, S. (1985). Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Bellah, R., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W., Swidler, A., and Tipton, S. (1991). The Good Society. New York: Vintage Books.

Bennett, W. (1989). Why western civilization? Phi Kappa Phi Journal, 69(3).

Brown, R. (1991). Schools of Thought: How the Politics of Literacy Shape Linking in the Classroom. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1989). Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the Twenty-first Century. New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Childrens Defense Fund (1992). Falling by the Wayside: Children in Rural America. Washington, DC: CDF.

Coleman, J. (1961). The Adolescent Society. New York: Free Press.

Cremin, L. (1961). The transformation of the school. New York: Vintage Books.

Cuban, L. (1993). What happens to reforms that last? The case of the junior high school. American Educational Research Journal, 29(2):227-251.

Cusick, P. (1983). The egalitarian ideal and the American high school: Studies of three schools. New York: Longman.

DeYoung, Alan (1994). The Life and Death of a Rural American High School: Farewell, Little Kanawha. New York: Garland.

DeYoung, Alan (1991a). Struggling with their histories: Economic decline and educational improvement in four rural southeastern school districts. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishers.

DeYoung, Alan (ed.) (1991b). Rural education: Issues and practice. New York: Garland Publishers.

DeYoung, Alan (1987). The status of American rural education research: An integrated review and commentary. Review of Educational Research, 57(2): 123-148.

DeYoung, Alan & Boyd, Thomas (1986). Urban school reforms for a rural district: A case study of school/community relations in Jackson County, Kentucky, 1899-1986. Journal of Thought, 21(4): 25-42.

DeYoung, Alan and Howley, Craig (1992). The political economy of rural school consolidation. Peabody Journal of Education, 67(4): 63-89.

DeYoung, Alan and Theobald, Paul (1991). Community schools in the national context: The social and cultural impact of educational reform movements on American rural schools. Journal of Research in Rural Education, 7(3): 3-14.

Goodlad, J. (1994). Educational Renewal: Better Teachers, Better Schools. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Goodlad, J. (1984). A place called school. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hobbs, D. (1992). In M. Galbraith (ed.) Education in the Rural American Community. Malaber, FL: Krueger, 22-41.

Howley, C. (1993). A territorial imperative: The authority of the state to reorganize public schools and districts. Journal of Research in Rural Education, 9(2), 74-83.

Howley, C., Howley, A., & Pendarvis, E. (in press). Out of our minds: Culture, talent development, and the instrumental dilemma of American schooling. New York: Teachers College Press.

Jackson, P. (1992). Untaught Lessons. New York: Teachers College Press.

Jacobs, J. (1984). Cities and the wealth of nations: Principles of economic life. New York: Random House.

Johnson, F. (March, 1988). "Assigning Type of Locale Codes to the 1987-1988 CCD Public School Universe." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research association convention, San Francisco, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 326 302).

Katz, L. (1990). "The Case for Mixed-age Grouping in Early Education." Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Katz, M. (1971). Class, bureaucracy, and schools. New York: Praeger.

Kliebard, Herbert (1986). The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893-1958. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Lasch, C. (1991). The True and Only heaven: Progress and Its Critics. New York: Norton.

Meyer, J., Benavot, A., Kamens, D., Cha, C., & Wong, S. (1992). School knowledge for the masses: World models and national primary curricular content in the twentieth century. Washington, DC: Falmer Press.

Monk, D. (1991). The organization and reorganization of small, rural schools. In DeYoung, 1991b:177-202.

Moretti, F. (1993). Who controls the canon? A classicist in conversation with cultural conservatives. Teachers College Record, 95(1), 113-126.

National Center for Education Statistics. (1992). Common Core of Data Surveys. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

National Center for Education Statistics. (1993). Common Core of Data Surveys [Machine readable data file, CD-ROM]. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of education research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics (producer). Arlington, VA: CTMG Publishers (developer).

Noddings, N. (1988). An ethos of caring and its implications for instructional arrangements. American Journal of Education, 96(2): 215-230.

Perkinson, Henry (1991). The Imperfect Panacea: American Faith in Education, 1865-1990. New York: Random House.

Peshkin, A. (1978). Growing up American. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Peshkin, A. (1982). The imperfect union: School consolidation and community conflict. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.

Sergiovanni, T. (1993, April). Organizations or communities? Changing the metaphor changes the theory. Paper presented

at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, GA.

Sher, Jonathan. & Tompkins, Rachel (1977). Economy, efficiency and equality: The myths of rural school and district consolidation. In Sher, (1977).

Sher, J. (1977). Education in Rural America: A Reassessment of the Conventional Wisdom. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Smith, D., & DeYoung, A. (1988). Big school vs. small school: Conceptual, empirical and political perspectives on the re-emerging debate. Journal of Rural and Small Schools, 2(2), 2-11.

Sizer, T. (1984). Horace's Compromise. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Sizer, T. (1992). Horace's School: Redesigning the American High School. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Stern, J. (1994). The condition of education in rural schools. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Theobald, P. and Newman, V. (1994). "The Implications of Communitarian/Liberal Theory for Public Education." Seattle, WA: Institute for Educational Inquiry, Works in Progress Series, No. 4.

Trow, M. (1966). The second transformation of American secondary education. In Class, Status and Power (R. Bendix and S. Lipset, eds.) New York: The Free Press.

Tyack, David (1974). The One Best System. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Valentine, J. (1993). Leadership in Middle Level Education (Volume 1). Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 356 535).

Waller, W. (1932). The Sociology of Teaching. New York: Wiley.

Wiles, J. and Bondi, J. (1993). The Essential Middle School. New York: Macmillan.

Figure P

NCES Type of Locale Codes

Type of Locale Code	Definition
Large City	Central city of an SMSA, with the city having a population greater than or equal to 400,000 or a population density greater than or equal to 6,000 people per square mile.
Mid-Size City	Central city of an SMSA, with the city having a population less than 400,000 and a population density less than 6,000 people per square mile.
Fringe of Large City	Place within an SMSA of a Large Central City and defined as urban by the Census Bureau.
Fringe of Mid-Size City	Place within an SMSA of a Mid-Size Central City and defined as urban by the Census Bureau.
Large Town	Town not within an SMSA, with a population greater than or equal to 25,000.
Small Town	Town not within an SMSA and with a population less than 25,000 and greater than or equal to 2,500 people.
Rural	A place with fewer than 2,500 people or a place having a ZIP code designated rural by the Census Bureau.

Source: Johnson, F. (1988, March). Assigning Type of Locale Codes to the 1987-1988 CCD Public School Universe. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 312 113)

Table N1

Changes Nationwide in Number and Proportion of Middle-Level Schools

		Type of Locale Code						
		7	6	5	4	3	2	1
1987/88	number of schools	2297	3366	312	1371	1775	1857	1045
	as proportion of all schools (%)	10.09	17.01	16.07	16.80	15.76	15.56	13.95
1991/92	number of schools	2710	3336	351	1365	1933	1884	1059
	as proportion of all schools	12.08	17.58	15.18	16.40	15.74	15.32	13.12

Key (type of locale) 7 = rural; 6 = small town; 5 = large town;
4 = fringe (mid-size city); 3 = fringe (large city)
2 = mid-size city; 1 = large city

Table N2

Changes in Number and Proportion of Middle-Level Schools (AEL Region) by Type of Locale

		Type of Locale Code						
		7	6	5	4	3	2	1
1987/88	number of schools	193	225	*	109	*	166	*
	as proportion of all schools (%)	18.5	18.1	*	18.2	*	18.6	*
1991/92	number of schools	219	231	*	110	*	153	*
	as proportion of all schools	21.0	18.5	*	18.0	*	17.6	*

Key (type of locale) 7 = rural; 6 = small town; 5 = large town;
4 = fringe (mid-size city); 3 = fringe (large city)
2 = mid-size city; 1 = large city

Note: Data omitted for types of locale with fewer than 50 schools. (See Johnson, 1988, for discussion of how the prevalence of types of locale varies substantially according to state.)

Table N3

Rural Schools, Number and Proportion, by Configuration Type (AEL Region) with Average Enrollment

Configuration Type:	Full Elementary	Residual Elementary	Middle-Level
1987/88			
Number	555	810	212
Proportion (%)	27.7	40.4	10.6
Average Enrollment	341.4	297.7	386.5
1991/92			
Number	404	874	227
Proportion (%)	21.0	45.5	11.8
Average Enrollment	354.3	309.2	425.2